

STOP THE ROT: Reframing Governance for Directors and Politicians, (2017) Bob Garratt, London: Routledge, pp322, Paperback £16.99

This book does not disappoint. Readers, like me, familiar with Bob Garratt's previous works on the learning organisation and leadership and director development will expect an engaging and at times entertaining read, and that is delivered. Those new to his work will come to appreciate his mix of rigour and pragmatism; in this case in analysing and providing prescriptions for the important practice of governance. It is perhaps typical of Garratt that his view of 'governance' is not limited to the more common analyses of corporate governance practices. His ambition is greater than that limited focus. But that is for very good reasons. According to Garratt, corporate governance is not enacted in a vacuum but is influenced by societal contexts that frame the foundations of those practices. And so, a narrow and exclusive focus on what happens in organisations cannot hope to improve the governance of those entities or produce approaches and practices that are fit for purpose by providing the assurance of desirable outcomes expected and deserved by employees and citizens. How does Garratt achieve his ambition? A brief description of the content and structure of the book will provide an answer to that question.

The book begins with a preface and an extensive introductory chapter. The preface provides the basic rationale for the book, which is essentially a continuation of Garratt's long-standing argument for the need for 'directors who think'. And not only 'think' but who also acknowledge and apply their need to learn and develop their competence to direct. In this book, that argument is extended to all who 'direct', including politicians, regulators and owners. The first sentence of the introduction succinctly sets the scene for the rest of the book; "This book is a provocation". This first chapter introduces the four main themes of the book which, in turn, reframe governance. The first is the need to recreate trust in organisational leaders; second is the need to rebuild human values in organisations; third is the need for assessable competence and professionalism in leadership and governance roles; and fourth is the need to create a system of national public oversight. This last will be a learning system that encompasses the four main players in governance; directors, owners, regulators and politicians; and be transparent to the public. The introduction then goes on to describe, explain and justify each of these themes, and also to introduce some additional arguments such as the meaning of governance adopted in the book, the 'Directors Dilemma' and Garratt's analysis of the failure of what he calls 'sophisticated states'. The chapter sets the context of key concepts and arguments which are elaborated in the main chapters. It ends with a conceptual framework which specifies the main players in national leadership and governance, and their connections and relationships. I found this framework to be very helpful in understanding the book's main arguments and as a guide to the rest of the book. I also found it persuasive as an overarching analysis of what Garratt sees as the weaknesses and failures in current approaches to and models of corporate governance.

Following the introduction, the book is divided into two sections. The first of these is named 'Setting the future context for effective governance'. It contains two chapters, each of which expands on Garratt's arguments related to values. The first of these chapters focuses on the meaning, purpose and 'value' of values. The second applies the analyses and arguments of the first to a human values-based approach to governance, and especially how this contrasts with an approach which was derived and emerged from executive led capitalism. It is not possible in a brief review to do justice to the breadth of evidence, analyses and arguments provided by Garratt in these two chapters to support and justify what is the foundation of his prescription for governance. Suffice it to say that I was impressed with that breadth and with Garratt's ability to connect diverse disciplines, concepts and sources in developing his analysis and argument. It is though necessary to emphasise that the

two chapters in Section One of the book are the foundation on which the remaining, and bulk, of the chapters rest; if the arguments in Section One are not accepted then neither will the prescriptions in Section Two. The remaining chapters form Section Two, named 'The five future governance roles'. I found this name slightly confusing as it suggests a further five chapters. In fact, there are only four. Each examines the role of each of the four main players in Garratt's conceptual framework; directors, owners, regulators and governments. The latter chapter title is also slightly confusing since previous references were to politicians, and the word used in the conceptual framework is 'legislators'. So, that inconsistency in language is a minor quibble. But the chapters themselves set out the role and required competence of each of the main players in closely argued detail. We are therefore very clear on what Garratt believes needs to happen in relation to governance and how each of the players can help to bring that about. According to Garratt, his prescriptions will address the needs described in the introduction and will produce an effective governance learning system.

As with the chapters in Section One, those in Section Two draw on a wide range of disciplines, evidence and sources to support their analyses and arguments. They also draw on Garratt's vast experience of acting as educator and consultant to leaders, directors and organisations across the world. That experience enables Garratt to include anecdotes to illustrate his points and to include actual examples to support his arguments. It is perhaps useful to note that, unlike some treatments of corporate governance, the chapters are not fixated on commercial, for profit organisations. They also address the contexts of the public and charitable/voluntary sectors. In a way, this reflects the broad scope of the book and Garratt's concern with national approaches to and models of governance.

So, what is my overall judgement? Well, as indicated in the opening paragraph, I have enjoyed reading and valued Bob Garratt's previous books. I have also found myself in broad agreement with his work in those previous books. That is also true of this reviewed book. It tackles a very important subject; probably one of the most important facing the world. It does so with verve and confidence in its analyses and prescriptions. For the most part, I am persuaded by the content and certainly believe that the ideas and proposals deserve serious consideration. I also believe that even those very familiar with academic and professional writing on corporate governance will learn new thinking and insights from the book. My one minor criticism is that I would have liked five chapters in Section Two. The book seems to lack an overall conclusion. So, a concluding chapter would have been useful and welcome. Otherwise, I judge this to be an important book with much to offer academics, policy makers and professionals with an interest in governance. And indeed, without such an interest. There will be even more useful and important learning for those on a topic which should interest us all.

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